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S E C R E T PARIS 008207

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE, EB/ESC/TFS (CLARK), S/CT (KUSHNER),  
INL/C/CP (PETERSON) AND IO/PSC (FITZGERALD)  
TREASURY/OFAC FOR PAUL LURIE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2020

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SUBJECT: (C) FRENCH REACTION TO FINCEN 314(A) NOTICE ON  
SYRIA AND THE MEHLIS REPORT

REF: STATE 214622

Classified By: Econ Counselor Kenneth Merten for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (S) We shared and discussed reftel points with the Asset-Freezing Directorate in the Ministry of Economy. Vincent Guitton, Head of the Services, Investment and IPR Division, noted that absent a designation on terrorism grounds, France normally lacks legal authority to block assets of individuals, but it has acted in exceptional cases before, surviving legal challenge, and he views this as such an exceptional case. He promised to coordinate with TRACFIN, the French financial investigative unit, after checking with the MFA. He noted that as often is the case, getting more precise biographical information (e.g., PDOB), would help in tracking any possible asset transfers.

2. (S) Poloff reviewed reftel points December 2 with MFA Syria/Lebanon desk officer Remy Bouallegue, who said the GoF was still reflecting on the question of advising French financial institutions to monitor accounts of specific individuals in advance of the Mehlis report release. Bouallegue stressed GoF agreement on the need to be vigilant and for financial institutions to be ready act quickly to freeze funds of individuals designated by UNIIIC and the UNSCR 1636 sanctions committee. At the same time, he stressed that the individuals named in the October Mehlis report had not yet been designated as suspects. He emphasized GoF caution over moving "too fast" or giving the impression of preempting UNIIIC and the sanctions committee, which could feed Syrian accusations that it is being unfairly targeted. Bouallegue said the MFA would coordinate further with the Finance Ministry to formulate the final GoF response. Poloff stressed that we were asking the GoF to advise financial institutions to exercise enhanced vigilance, not take preemptive action to freeze accounts. Bouallegue took the point, but concluded that the GoF would likely seek to maintain a discreet approach, and avoid giving any signs of prejudging the findings of the next Mehlis report.

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